

WL Webb Brown- Mendocino County

1. Career before becoming assessor.

Was a contract farmer and grade A dairyman and gas station operator. Served on irrigation district and three school boards. Highly involved with budgets and salary negotiations. Active with farm bureau.

2. Career milestones-dates.

Ran for assessor in 1954, took office in 1955. Reelected 5 times. Retired early in Oct. 1977.

3. Postscript

Continued farm activities with son. Active in Democratic politics.

4. Relationship with predecessor.

Excellent. Knew him pretty well before being elected.

5. Relationship with successor.

Art Church had been in assessor's office for years, and was opposition candidate in 1954 election. He took a job in the private sector after the election. In 1960, asked him to return to run office as Assistant Assessor. Got along well, as Assistant, he did detail work and allowed Assessor to work on political issues.

6. Why did you run for Assessor.

Was asked to run for Tax Collector, but replied only job he would consider was Assessor which he felt had a significant roll in local government. Word got out and campaign committees were created.

7. Greatest accomplishments.

After election, was told the SBE was proposing to raise all assessments 50% based on earlier sampling. County BOS members met with him, saying he had a hell of a job ahead, and offered their support. He converted office from using part time deputies by hiring full time real property appraisers, auditor appraisers and trained timber appraisers to assure all types of properties would be assessed properly.

Worked with other counties and legislative assistants to create Williamson Act.

Followed up by working to create a better method of taxing timber which resulted in the Timber Preserve Zoning. Had to overcome much opposition from other assessors, SBE, and some legislators.

8. What could you have done differently.

9. Fondest memories of office.

See question 7; high water of career was working on the timber standards committee.

10. Least favorites parts of career.

11. Relationship with CAA.

Was Secretary of state Association for 3 years, VP for one year, and President for one year. Was chairman of legislative committee for 3 1/2 years. Chaired the timber standards advisory committee for 13 years. President of Northern Association for 1 year.

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12. Remembering "assessor scandals" of the 60s.

No questions there were scandals in 3 counties. Those assessors had to leave office.

At that time, Mr. Brown was on the CAA legislative committee. The Legislature was proposing a major bill to revamp Assessors responsibilities. Mr. Brown was fully involved in helping formulate the bill to make the proposals workable. The final bill mandated appraiser schooling, allowed auditing for appraisals, and generally worked to formalize the relationship of the assessor and taxpayers.

He addressed the Farm Bureau state conference, and told them, with the passage of this bill, "the jig was up"; the former unreliable property statements were out. Now appraisers would be able to look at farmers' books and make honest assessments.

13. Pressure and stress of pre- Prop. 13.

Never thought it was that bad. Mr. Brown spent a lot of time addressing service clubs, business and taxpayer groups in that portion of the county to be reappraised. Saw the problem coming, and went around the county promoting Watson's proposal for 2% tax rate with all school costs going to the state. At one meeting, Jarvis told him that if the Watson bill doesn't pass, worse will follow.

- oppose or support Prop. 13 .

Opposed, but knew it was going to pass.

- how about Prop. 13 now?

Feels it's unconstitutional, but the people voted for it and now it's accepted.

14. Involved in state or county politics other than assessor?

Always involved in local Democratic politics, and worked with contacts he had made in Sacramento.

- did you run other county offices while assessor? no

15. What kind of person makes a good county assessor?

Must know the purpose of the assessor's office; better know the R&T; should have full knowledge of his county; be public minded.

- Appraisal or RE background requirement for assessor? Not necessary

16. Interesting points not covered by questions.

Contracted with an outside company for the first roll processed electronically; it went perfectly on the first try. Then the county created a data processing department, and it took them 5 tries.

- send photos with descriptions.